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HOUSE RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The members of the House of Representatives of the State of Illinois were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr., of Los Angeles, California, on March 29, 2005; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Cochran was born October 2, 1937, in Shreveport, Louisiana, to Hattie and Johnnie L. Cochran, Sr., the great-grandson of slaves, the grandson of a sharecropper, and the son of an insurance salesman; the family moved to California in 1943 and settled in Los Angeles in 1949; he attended Mt. Vernon Jr. High School where he discovered his talent for debate; in the early 1950s he became one of only 12 black students enrolled at the prestigious Los Angeles High School; he excelled at the school, earning membership in the Honor Society as well as playing on the football team; and

WHEREAS, When the Supreme Court outlawed legal segregation in 1954, Thurgood Marshall became his hero, and it was then that he knew he wanted to become a lawyer as there could be no better way to serve humanity; and

WHEREAS, Upon his graduation from Los Angeles High School, he attended UCLA and joined Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Incorporated, in which he remained active throughout his life; after graduating from UCLA in 1959 he entered Loyola Law School, and during that time he became the first black law clerk hired by the Los Angeles City Attorney; and

WHEREAS, During this period of time he married Barbara Berry and they had two daughters, Melodie and Tiffany; he also had a son, Jonathan Cochran, with Patty Sikora; in 1981 he married Sylvia Dale Mason; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Cochran passed the California bar in 1963 and

1 became one of the first Deputy City Attorneys of Los Angeles,
2 where he became one of the top trial litigators; in 1965, he
3 resigned and started the firm Cochran, Atkins and Evans, which
4 handled a broad range of civil and criminal cases; in 1977, the
5 Los Angeles Criminal Courts Bar Association honored him as
6 Criminal Trial Lawyer of the Year; shortly thereafter, he was
7 asked to return to the county as its first black Assistant
8 District Attorney; two years later he was named the Outstanding
9 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year by the California Trial
10 Lawyers Association; and

11 WHEREAS, While working in the District Attorney's Office,
12 Mr. Cochran instituted many lasting reforms, among them the
13 establishment of the Domestic Violence Council and the Sexual
14 Assault Program, as well as successfully attacking the Los
15 Angeles Police Department's pattern of misconduct; he returned
16 to private practice in 1981, determined to continue challenging
17 the abusive practices of law enforcement; in 1991, he received
18 Los Angeles's Civil Trial Lawyer of the Year Award; he is the
19 only person to be honored for his work in both the criminal and
20 civil courts; and

21 WHEREAS, Mr. Cochran was able to use his success to extend
22 justice to the people who needed it most and could least afford
23 it; in the late 1990s, he founded The Cochran Firm, one of the
24 nation's largest plaintiff's law firms; he also joined with
25 "Dream Team" partners, Peter Neufeld and Barry Scheck, to form
26 Cochran, Neufeld and Scheck, a firm that focuses on civil
27 rights cases involving police misconduct and wrongful
28 convictions; these firms put into practice, on a daily basis,
29 his lifelong dedication to fighting for the injured and
30 disenfranchised; and

31 WHEREAS, Mr. Cochran gave of his time, talent, and money to
32 numerous civic organizations and charities; he gave speeches
33 and lectured often at universities and conferences around the

1 world; he was a frequent speaker at Harvard Law School; he
2 served on Pepsi Cola's African American Advisory Board, the
3 Board of the Lawyer's Mutual Insurance Company, the Board of
4 The Stay Strong Foundation, and the Board of the NAACP Legal
5 Defense and Educational Fund, an organization founded by
6 Thurgood Marshall; and

7 WHEREAS, He was the Chairman of the Upper Manhattan
8 Empowerment Zone; he was particularly proud that a school was
9 named after him, The Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr. Academy of Legal
10 Studies and Community Service in East Orange, New Jersey; he
11 was a member of the International Academy of Trial Lawyers, the
12 American College of Trial Lawyers, the Inner Circle of
13 Advocates, the John M. Langston Bar Association, the National
14 Bar Association, and the American Bar Association; he served on
15 the Los Angeles Board of Airport Commissioners for 12 years,
16 and was its first black Chairman; and

17 WHEREAS, Mr. Cochran was preceded in death by his mother,
18 Hattie, and his younger brother, RaLonzo Cochran; and

19 WHEREAS, He leaves to cherish his memory a devoted wife,
20 Sylvia Dale Mason Cochran; his loving father, Johnnie L.
21 Cochran, Sr.; his dedicated children, Melodie T. Cochran,
22 Tiffany K. Cochran Edwards, and Jonathan E. Cochran; his
23 son-in-law, Javarro Edwards, his daughter-in-law, Cheryl
24 Cochran; his adoring sisters, Pearl Cochran-Baker and Martha
25 Cochran Sherrard; his brothers-in-law, William A. Baker, Sr.,
26 and Fredric W. Sherrard; his precious mother-in-law, Daisy W.
27 Mason; his nieces, Arlyce Baker Chandler, Cherene Sherrard
28 Johnson, P. LaToi Cochran, and RaLicia Cochran; his nephew,
29 William A. Baker, Jr.; his great niece, Alexa Chandler; his
30 great nephews, Justin Lopez and Hayden W. Johnson; his uncle
31 Henry Bass; his aunt Janie Bass, and a host of family members
32 and friends; and

1 WHEREAS, Like Thurgood Marshall, Mr. Cochran's impact on
2 our world will continue to be felt for generations; he spent
3 his life proving that the rights guaranteed by the law of our
4 land indeed belong to all of us and that one determined man can
5 make a difference; therefore, be it

6 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
7 NINETY-FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
8 we mourn the passing of Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr., and honor his
9 exceptional career, remarkable legacy, and significant
10 accomplishments; and be it further

11 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
12 presented to his family as an expression of our deepest
13 condolences.